

lot of people who voted for me because they believed in what I was saying, didn't really believe we could turn the country around. They didn't really believe we would ever get rid of the deficit. They didn't really believe we would ever reduce the welfare rolls. They didn't really believe that we could make crime come down every year. And even though every single citizen knew some teacher that they just adored, they didn't really believe that on a sweeping national basis, we could improve the performance of our students. And now that we know, that imposes a special responsibility on us.

When I leave office, we're going to have paid off \$355 billion of the Nation's debt. We know we can get the country out of debt and still keep investing in education. We've got the crime rate coming down 8 years in a row; the welfare rolls are half what they were. But a lot of people still don't know that the schools, against increasing challenges, are doing better and better. And I'll just give you one example.

I was in Kentucky, in Owensboro, a little town in western Kentucky, in a school that was one of the 170 schools in 1996 identified as a low performing school. Within 2 years, 91 percent of the schools were off the list. As of last year, in 4 years, in a school with two-thirds of the kids eligible for free or reduced lunches, the number of children reading at or above grade level had gone from 12 to 57 percent; doing math at or above grade level had gone from 5 to 70 percent; doing science at or above grade level had gone from zero to 64 percent. The school ranked 18th in the State in overall performance, with two-thirds of the kids eligible for free or reduced lunch. And in Kentucky, 10 of the 20 best performing grade schools have over half the kids eligible for free or reduced lunch. Race, income, and region are not destiny, thanks to teachers and schools. And we need to get that out there.

And that's what you represent to me. You are the living embodiment that you get more from giving than taking in life. And I can't think of anybody who's given more. My only regret today is that I have never been in one of Marilyn Whirry's classes. [Laughter] So maybe we'll get the next best thing as I bring her up here and present her her award.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Teacher of the Year.

[At this point, the President presented the award to Ms. Whirry, who then made brief remarks and gave the President a crystal apple.]

**The President.** Thank you. Well, thank you. I have all kinds of questions I wanted to ask you, about Dostoyevski and Camus and—[laughter]

**Ms. Whirry.** Okay.

**The President.** —the last novel he wrote that's just been published. What did Toni Morrison mean when she said I was America's first black President? [Laughter] I thought it was a great compliment.

Let me tell you, I generally believe Presidents should not receive awards because the job is award enough. But I love this. And every day I have left here, this award will be on my desk in the Oval Office, and I hope you get to see it on television.

Thank you. Bless you all. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:28 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.

### Statement on Congressional Action on Africa and Caribbean Basin Trade Legislation

May 11, 2000

I am pleased that Congress has completed action on historic legislation that will boost investment, growth, and opportunity in Africa and the Caribbean Basin, while improving the global competitive position of our own industries. This step reaffirms America's commitment to open trade and strengthens the partnership between the United States and our friends in Africa and the Caribbean Basin. It will encourage these nations to continue building open economies, bolster their efforts to alleviate poverty, and improve long-term prospects for democracy and stability around the world. I look forward to signing this measure into law and congratulate Members of Congress from both parties who have worked so hard to enact the "African Growth and Opportunity Act" and the Caribbean Basin trade enhancement legislation.

**Statement on House of Representatives Action on the “Conservation and Reinvestment Act”**

*May 11, 2000*

I am very pleased by the overwhelming bipartisan vote in the House today to provide significant new resources to meet America’s critical conservation and recreation needs. Today’s vote on H.R. 701, the “Conservation and Reinvestment Act,” is a historic step toward achieving permanent conservation funding—a goal embodied in the lands legacy initiative I put forward in my budget this year. I applaud Chairman Young, Representative Miller, and others for their leadership on this effort.

We will continue working with Congress to secure protected and permanent conservation funding within the framework of a balanced budget that provides for critical budget and fiscal priorities, and with no burdensome or unnecessary restrictions on Federal authorities that have proven so effective in preserving America’s natural heritage. I urge the Senate to move swiftly on this legislation. I am confident that working together we can create a permanent conservation endowment that will be a true gift to future generations.

**Statement on the Situation in Sierra Leone**

*May 11, 2000*

U.N. Secretary-General Annan and I agreed this morning that the international community must intensify international efforts to restore peace in Sierra Leone and to prevent a return to all-out civil war. The situation there has been grave. But the U.N. is determined to fulfill its mission; African and other nations are willing to act; and we are ready to help them.

I have instructed our military to provide needed assistance to accelerate the deployment of troops to UNAMSIL and informed the U.N. that the United States will help transport reinforcements. A U.S. military transport aircraft is now in Jordan to move ammunition and supplies that are needed im-

mediately for the Jordanian elements in Sierra Leone.

We intend to support the commitment west African nations have made to send additional troops to Sierra Leone to restore peace. A U.S. military team is now in Nigeria to determine what assistance might be needed from the international community to outfit and transport these forces as quickly as possible.

I welcome the statement west African leaders made on Tuesday at their emergency summit in Abuja, Nigeria, calling for the release of all hostages and pledging to protect democratic institutions in Sierra Leone.

I have asked Rev. Jesse Jackson, my Special Envoy for Democracy in Africa, to return to the region to work with leaders there for a peaceful resolution of this crisis. Reverend Jackson has been actively involved in our diplomatic effort to help the people of Sierra Leone realize their peaceful aspirations.

**Proclamation 7307—Peace Officers Memorial Day and Police Week, 2000**

*May 11, 2000*

*By the President of the United States of America*

**A Proclamation**

From our earliest days as a Nation, America has been blessed with citizens of courage and character who have dedicated their lives to keeping the peace in our communities. Five years after the creation of the U.S. Marshals Service in 1789, U.S. Marshal Robert Forsyth was shot and killed in the line of duty. He was the first of more than 14,000 law enforcement personnel since that time to give his life to uphold the law and protect the people he was sworn to serve.

Our Nation owes a lasting debt of gratitude to the men and women of our law enforcement community who, each day, put their lives at risk to protect us and ensure the safety of our families and homes. Because of their skill, valor, and commitment, we have begun to turn the tide on crime in America. The murder rate is at its lowest level in more than 30 years, and the overall crime rate is at its lowest point in 25 years. There are